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ABSTRACT

In April 1992, 16 individuals who were all employed in manual or nonsupervisory jobs and who had all participated in employer-funded adult education courses offered partly or entirely during work hours attended a weekend retreat in the north of England. They spent the weekend talking and writing about their experiences with work-based learning, its effect on their lives, and the broader benefits of work-based education programs. This book presents the collected writings of the weekend program's participants. The writings are in various formats, including reports, essays, and poems. In the introductory section, two participants describe their involvement in workplace learning and its significance in their lives. The writings in chapters 1 and 2 describe typical workdays in the lives of service occupation and factory workers, and the poems and essays in chapter 3 focus on the participants' reasons for taking work-based adult education courses and the personal and career benefits of the courses. The works presented in chapter 4 offer reasons why giving employees access to education during work time benefits employers and include points for employers to consider when developing work-based learning programs. In chapter 5, participants offer their views of the weekend retreat. (MN)

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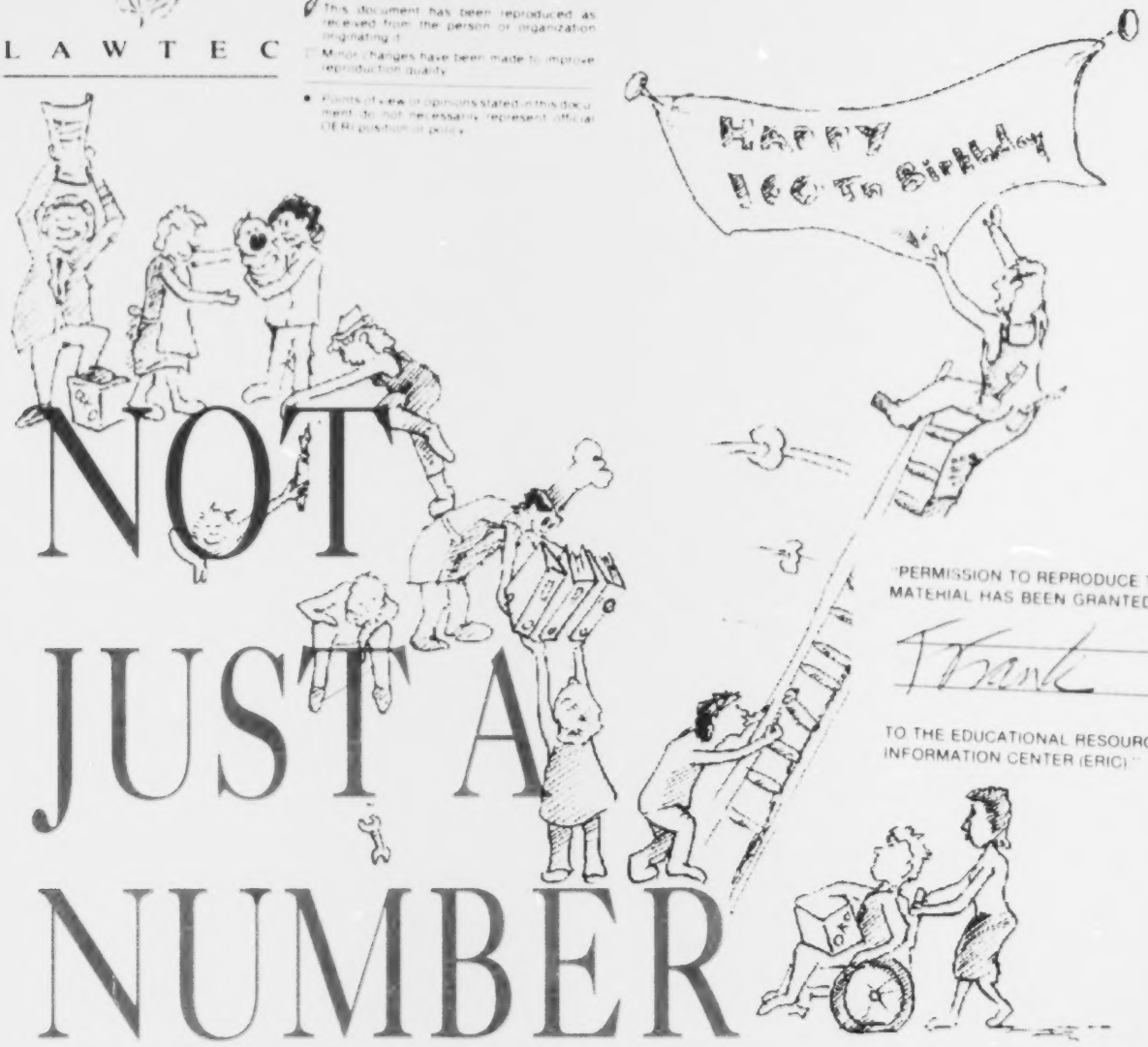

NOT JUST A NUMBER

Writings about workplace learning

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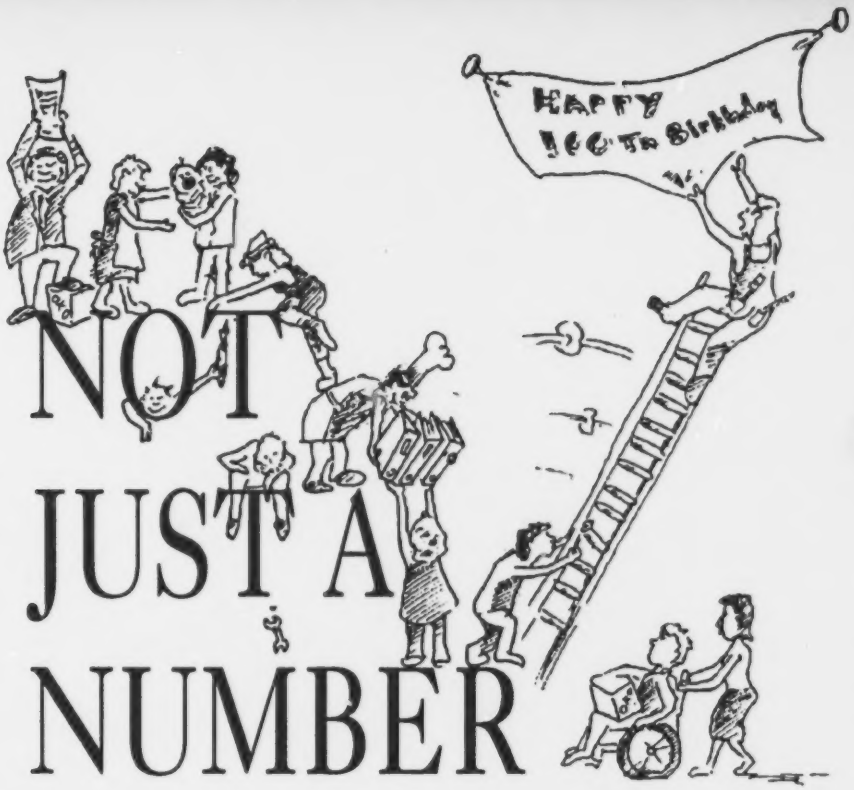

NOT JUST A NUMBER

Experiences of workplace learning

By

Workers in the North of England

Edited by Fiona Frank
with a foreword by Jane Mace

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

Iston Hall, a big, old place
We went to learn at our own pace
Introductions and talks
Writing and thoughts
People from different walks of life
Bringing education to new heights
Expectations rising high
Do you think we will reach the sky?

Maria Smith
(This is my first attempt at poetry)

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FOREWORD

BY JANE MACE

Writing is a means to reflect, to express ideas, and to share experience. To write is to release a kind of energy. Some of the knowledge and feeling that was buried inside us is now outside, for us and for others to see on the page.

Few people in everyday paid employment have the chance to practise this use of writing. On the contrary: for most people, the idea of writing down what we think and feel holds a kind of terror. Part of the terror is to do with an idea that writing is a kind of evidence: proof of our ability to think properly. The fear is that we shall be found out as poor thinkers, caught out as bad spellers, shown up as wrong in our use of English.

This book is a lovely celebration of getting back to the good that writing can do us; and how the work of writing fits with the work of earning a wage. It's a book about work and about learning, written during a weekend meeting of people who know about both.

In the late 1980s in this country, in other European countries, and in North America, there has been a good deal of public talk about training at work, and about finding out what the training 'needs' of workplaces might be. In real life, it is still the minority who get the kind of training at work which offers a genuine opportunity for workers to reflect, to express ideas, and to share experience (which are also the business of the best kind of literacy education in the broadest sense.)

The pieces in this book tell something of what this opportunity can mean, when it happens. The weekend during which it was put together was itself an example of good 'training' - an event in which people met as equals to compare notes, offer mutual support and recognition, and put together proposals for improvements.

Written by people with first hand experience of those few courses that do exist for people in manual work, this is not a solemn textbook, a glossy report, or an impersonal policy document on workplace training. It's a collection of ideas, comments and discussion on this subject, intended to encourage more discussion in other places. I think it will; and I think that the recommendations in Chapter Four make important reading for any organisation or policymaker aiming to make training at work an effective use of workers' time.

Jane Mace
Goldsmiths' College, London, June 1992

Preface

In April 1992, sixteen students and five tutors, together with three children and two creche workers, spent the weekend together at Alston Hall, Longridge, near Preston, in Lancashire. This book is a product of that weekend.

The purpose of the weekend was for the students to talk and write about their experience of work-based learning. All of the sixteen worked in the north of England, in manual or non-supervisory jobs, and while they worked for different employers, what they had in common was that all of them had been on adult education courses partly or wholly in work time and funded by their employers.

In this book the workers speak about the profound effect that taking up education as adults has had on their lives. Some of the pieces are about the weekend itself; some describe the students' working day; and the section 'Thinkers' looks at the whole issue of access to education in work time, and discusses some points which the students suggest employers should have in mind when thinking about setting up such schemes.

Whether you are an employer, a tutor, a college principal, or a worker thinking about taking up the opportunity of workplace learning, if you get something out of this book it will have achieved its purpose.

Fiona Frank

Fiona Frank
on behalf of

The Editorial Committee - Carol Allcock, Becky Bailey, Graham Birkin, Brenda Cutforth, Fiona Frank, Clare Gillard, Pat Goodman, Annice Harrison, Jean Hewitt, Chris O'Mahony, Maria Smith, and Margaret Walsh.

The Editorial committee cannot, of course, be held responsible for any of the contributors' views expressed in this book.

May 1992

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Introduction

What is workplace learning? Two workers' stories.

The possibilities are endless .....

I thought I would just be a cleaner until retirement. But now going on courses I feel I can better myself. I can put my view of things over even if other people do not agree. Also I very rarely say 'I can not do that' not without trying anyway. I do not put myself down as much, because I now do things that I would not have dreamed of doing this time last year. I also think things through more. The courses I have been on in the last year have given me more confidence in myself to do more.

The first course I went on started in April 1991, it was called Take Ten. One day paid leave per week for ten weeks, Sheffield City Council runs this course, with tutors from Loxley College in Sheffield. Take Ten is run three times a year. Loxley College also run 'Take Fifteen' for part-time workers. On the course I was on we learned about our council and how it is run. We looked around the Town Hall, went in the council chambers, talked to some councillors about things that we were interested in, sat in a sub-committee meeting, and looked around the publicity department. We were also shown around the buildings that were going to be used for the World Student Games and asked questions about the Games to their Deputy Leader.

For three of the ten weeks we were split into three groups. I chose 'The Greening of the City'. Included in this was a visit to the canal and local river, the River Don. We looked at pollution, learned how to test for pollution, and about how it is being tackled. There was a visit to a pond that had been cleaned of pollution by a voluntary group called Sheffield Wildlife. One visit took us to a countryside unit at Loxley where a site has been made so school children can study different wildlife and plants.

The Take Ten course covered a lot of things too numerous to mention in this report. For our homework we did a diary of our day's experience. On one of the weeks Fiona Frank came and told us about the research she was doing on workplace education which has led to this weekend course at Alston Hall, Longridge, Preston, putting together all our experience on workplace courses from different cities.

The Take Ten course also led to a weekend course on Women's Studies which was held at Northern College, Barnsley. Our Take Ten tutor ran this; it took place in November 1991. On my last day at Take Ten, Val White came from Northern College and told us about the courses they ran.

That is how, in January this year, I went to Northern College for a week's course, the first one of three, called Learning to Learn. Sheffield City Council paid for me to go on this course, the same as the other people on the course, who were paid for by their Council. A lot of the course was writing and group work. The programme headings were Using Libraries, Using Books, Reading Techniques, Taking Notes, Working in a Group. They have a creche so students' children can be with their mums.

And last but not least I have been on a two day AIDS course, and four day course for people who work in Residential Units, both in Sheffield.

Both Take Ten and Northern College award credits for their courses, in recognition of the programme of work done.

Jennifer Cussens

A chance to work

I began working for Brooke Bond Foods seventeen years ago as a part time machinist, making Oxo cubes. This was four evenings a week. This fitted in very well with my family commitments. Then as my daughter grew older I transferred to days as this seemed easier rather than looking for another job.

However, two years ago all the workers (about 400 people) were called into the canteen and we were informed that the factory would be moving to Worksop in 1992, and that we would all be made redundant. This news was met by a wall of silence as people tried to take in the fact.

This, obviously, made me think seriously about my future. I had to face the idea of starting over again at 45; not by choice, but being forced into it and knowing that employers wanted younger more qualified staff.

I at least had had previous experience both in applying for jobs and doing different types of work; many of my colleagues had only ever worked for Brooke Bond Foods. Some had started straight from school on the recommendation of a relative and had never written a C.V. or application letter.

I decided to enrol for evening classes and as I had previously worked in an office I chose word-processing and English GCSE. The firm then informed us that they would pay the fees for anyone taking courses which would help with any future careers. They also had interviews with each member of staff to try and sort out what kind of work people would be looking for. The outcome of this was that courses were arranged in Caring, Computing and Catering which we attended on Friday afternoons in our own time over a fifteen week period. The firm also offered a two day job search skills course and a communications skills course which were done in the firm's time. The courses were either held in the training room at the factory or at Accrington College. I attended the two day job search skills course and the computer course.

While many people took advantage of the courses others held the attitude that they were a waste of time or they lacked the confidence to try them. From the firm's point of view they had production figures to meet and orders to fill so they can't afford to have shop floor workers on courses indefinitely. At one time the Friday afternoon classes clashed with the overtime and it was difficult for people to choose between the two. But I'm quite prepared to give my own time up. It shows you're prepared to put something into it yourself.

The result of all this activity for me, is that I have gained confidence, learnt new skills, learnt to deal with new situations and now the future holds more promise than it did two years ago.

My priority had been looking after my family and for the first time in years I'm doing something for myself.

I think that on shop floors all over Britain there are workers who have talents that lie dormant because they are not given the opportunity to find out what their capabilities are.

Jean Hewitt

1 Workers-Carers

Between us, we work as Home Helps and Cleaners, Cooks and Carers; we make Oxo cubes, central heating boilers, and cosmetics.

In these chapters, we introduce ourselves as workers. We wrote about a typical day.

Workers-Carers

Chapter One

Richard -a home care worker

9.00 Set off for work
Get first client up, he's very heavy -perhaps had a minor stroke, have to use wheelchair - danger of back injury

10.00 Shopping call. Get pension, shop for 90 year old with very sweet tooth, cup of tea together when I get back, husband goes into respite care every 6 weeks or so - *she goes into slump while he's gone.*

Thinking about needs of various clients - them as people as well as 'cases'. Feeling sometimes 100% responsible for a person's welfare.

11.00 Staff meeting and lunch

1.00 Cover other clients' shopping

3.30 Finish work

Totally responsible for someone's welfare.

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Maria - a cook at an alternative to custody centre

8.30 Leave for work

9.00 Prepare for Magistrate's Day, offenders' names on the wall have to be removed. Expecting forty visiting magistrates and judges. I prepared food for following day. The preparation and cooking was ongoing throughout the day.

10.30 Checking who will be in for the week, how many youngsters on I.T. and who will be in for education, also youngsters sometimes come straight from court. I have a list of who comes in and what time they will want a meal.

11.00 Shopping for work.

12.00 Drink, game of pool with education youngsters

12.30 Prepare dinner for rolling group

1.00 Dinner

1.30 Check house to make sure it's clean

2.00 Take polaroid photographs of everybody who works at Archway, place on card with their name and occupations. We had done a booklet for visiting magistrates, each member of staff writing a piece on what their work entails.

Rest of the day was spent cooking and preparing for next day.

4.30 Meal served to rolling group.

6.30 Check everything is ready for Tuesday, no youngsters allowed in on this day as they may meet a magistrate who has to sentence them.

Custody - or alternatives

My place of work is an alternative to custody, males and females attend but do not work in the same group.

We have six intermediate officers, two teachers, one secretary, my boss and myself - I am the cook. I also get involved in other areas. The age group of the juveniles who attend the Archway is 14-18 years old. Ours is a daily centre, not residential.

Last year I had the chance to visit Werrington Detention Centre, it's a lock-up for 14-21 year olds. We were shown round by one of the warders. Starting outside, we looked at the gardens and farm they run themselves.

The farm is productive and makes a good profit, they produce enough milk to sell to local dairies. We were shown the bricklaying workshop, car maintenance, painting and decorating and lowering of ceilings. They also have schoolrooms, some of the youngsters have not attended an ordinary school for three years.

They are allowed home for the odd weekend depending on behaviour and length of sentence. They have reviews on each person, but I felt they didn't follow through with them until near the end of their sentence.

We proceeded into the prison, then you know where you are. Out of a modern office into stark reality, every door locked, many doors are solid steel bars. They are all dressed the same in dull clothes that leave a lot to be desired and very ill fitting, they are all cloned - no individuality.

Nowhere looked clean. Dormitories where they slept were steel beds chipped paint and wafer thin mattresses. Showers were allowed more than once a week, luxury to some of them, clean clothes two or three times a week.

The boys we met didn't look too bad but they didn't look good either. Some were in solitary, but we were told they didn't leave them for long periods of time. It was distressing to see young people handcuffed.

Youngsters who weren't bright ended up in the kitchen, which is hard work; early mornings and long hours.

The kitchens looked like a health danger zone, forty eight pence per person was allowed each day and by law one piece of fresh fruit has to be given.

I was not impressed with the chef who thought most of them ought to be exterminated.

A handful of staff talked to us after the tour, they gave a rosy glow of everything. I found it appalling, I could not see how the system would deter you from a life of crime, my personal view is they learnt how to climb the ladder of crime. Alternative to custody in my view is far more humane, and has a better chance of success.

Maria Smith

Patricia - an ancillary worker

8.30	Set off for work
9.30	Start work, planning meeting, fill time sheets in
10.30	Have a cup of tea
11.00	Go round to Ranmoor
11.30	Go to the chip shop and get lunch
12.00	Have lunch
12.30	Set off to go to Skyedge Hostel
1.00	Start work at Skyedge, put laundry away
1.30	Empty urine bottles
2.00	Handover meeting
2.45	Serve drinks
3.15	A cup of tea
3.30	General tidying
4.00	Finish work

It was distressing to see young people handcuffed.

A Home Help - and More.

My name is Jean White. I work for Sheffield City Council within the Family and Community Services as a Home Help/relief Home Warden on Division 6. I have been a Home Help for five years and a relief Home Warden for three of that time.

My role involves working mainly with the elderly in their homes, cleaning, caring and generally meeting their needs. Almost all are ill or infirm. We are required to do a variety of tasks, depending on their degree of disability. This also affects the time factor allocated to each client.

The tasks can be both physical and psychological. The physical needs are fairly obvious, housework, shopping and generally maintaining a reasonable standard of hygiene. The latter, however, requires gaining trust and a degree of tact and diplomacy. We often find ourselves called upon to be mentor and catalyst, but mostly, it is hoped, friend.

People tend to think, as I myself did, that all the old are sweet and dear. Sadly, this is not so. Some are peevish, jealous and downright belligerent. Some are dirty. One can usually tell whether it is their present state of infirmity that makes them as they are or whether they have always been so. They are humans, like us only older and just because they have reached a 'good' age doesn't mean they qualify for a halo.

Sometimes I question the need for people like us. After all, in a proper world we would care for each other and mind our old and disadvantaged. When I was small we cared for our grandparents and Mother used to keep an eye on the elderly spinster in the next yard. I can't remember Home Helps and the like then. I'm sure that families 'step back' so to speak at times, perhaps without even realising it, and leave their dependants to our service.

We are on the whole very much self-managed and can find ourselves solely responsible for making important 'on the spot' decisions. Thus the job can be lonely and at times one feels rather isolated having no immediate colleagues and such. Mostly, however, it is very rewarding. In general, I like the elderly. If you listen, they have such a lot to tell, Some have led very interesting lives. I love to hear tales of old Athercliffe, moonlight flits, Banners and the blitz.

Jean White

Cleaning in a Remand Centre

Limb Lane is a remand unit for young male offenders between the ages of 11 and 17. It's a holding place for boys who are awaiting court appearances. Some lads come in just overnight, some are there for months. They are well looked after and catered for while in the unit. This extends to pocket money, bus passes, trips out, bowling, fishing, ice skating or the cinema.

The unit is in Dore, an upmarket suburb of Sheffield. It's in lovely countryside. One of the buildings is a large stone built house, which has been converted to offices, we call it the mews. The unit itself is a newer two storey building. At first sight it looks as if it has been neglected, but because of the nature of the boys staying there it's a never ending task to keep it up to standard, i.e. cleaning off graffiti, fire extinguishers being let off, which because of the obvious danger have to be filled nearly every day.

The group of five boys in the unit at the moment are by Limb Lane standards quite well behaved and not destructive.

My day starts at 9.00am. When we arrive the four ancillary staff go into a small room where we change and put bags etc in our lockers. We all have a set of keys for the unit and we are very careful not to let them out of our sight. We all then sit down for about 20 minutes before we start work. I call this time 'gearing up time'. Myself and another domestic wash any breakfast pots up and generally clean round the kitchen. Today being Monday, we clean the bedrooms and do the laundry mainly.

Every bedroom has a lock (when they haven't smashed them off). Cleaning the unit is the same as cleaning your own home. There are certain cleaning agents we are not allowed to use, e.g. bleach, polish. However I use polish now and again, but keep it locked up at all times, as it could be used by the boys for sniffing.

There are eight bedrooms plus corridors, a staff flat, a night office and lounge plus four toilets and three bathrooms on the second floor. Usually on a Monday morning we like to clean right through and get that out of the way. It takes us up to lunchtime with a break from 10.15 till 10.45.

We break for lunch at 12.30 till 1.00. After lunch again we go into the kitchen to wash the pots. After pots are done, rubbish bag emptied and floor swept, I mop the floor. We have a break then for about 20 minutes. After that we usually spend some time in the laundry. As the boys change their bedding on Monday mornings there is usually a lot of ironing. Having done that one of us mops one of the staircases down and the other will vac the lounge/dining room.

Becky Bailey

It's the same as cleaning your own home.

CENTRE FOR CHILDREN WITH SEVERE LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

Ringinglow Unit is on the outskirts of Sheffield on the way to the Peak district. Ringinglow is a home for children with severe learning difficulties. The ages in our unit are from 8-19 years. There is only one client who lives in the unit full time, the other clients stay from one night up to three nights each week. This is called respite care. It gives the family with a handicapped child a rest, as well as letting the parents spend more time with their able-bodied children, who they may only be able to spend a short period of time with when the handicapped child is at home. It is also good for the handicapped child to mix with their peers.

Some of the clients' parents have not got a car so they cannot take their children to youth clubs that are geared for handicapped people. So when our clients come to Ringinglow for respite care they are taken to the clubs if they want to go. Each client has a link worker, that means a staff member who is a go-between, between parents, school, social worker and other persons, to discuss what things are best for the client and also taking into account what the client wants themselves. These reviews are on a regular basis. The above is only a brief outline of what we do at Ringinglow but we all work towards putting the client first.

Whatever job a person does at Ringinglow they have to relate well with children. They also need to have patience, but be firm in some aspects.

Jennifer Cussens

Jennifer - an ancillary worker at a centre for children with severe learning difficulties

8.00am	Arrive. The clients by this time are finishing their breakfast. Sometimes they ask you to sit with them until they have finished. If a shortage of RSW staff (residential social workers) on the shift I help by taking the clients to catch the 804 which does not come to the unit, but is only for children with severe learning difficulties. Otherwise I talk to the rest while waiting for their transport, taxies or buses that come to the unit.
8.30	This is the time I normally start my own job of cleaning. At the moment I clean the admin block, as well as the offices. There is a TV room that the children use. The front door comes onto this block.
10.15	Time to do the toast and drinks for staff. Whoever is free does this including the RSWs.
10.30	Break (Put the flag out!)
10.45	Wash the pots and start with the duster.
12.30	Dinner time. The cook usually makes it. Cleaners do not get paid for dinner time but the RSWs do. If the children are around weekend or holidays they have their dinner with them, but I can have half an hour peace and quiet.
1.00	On Monday we have a meeting for all staff which I know does not happen in all units, to discuss the clients' progress. Information about new arrivals.
1.00	Back to the grindstone until
2.30	Break time. This is the time when the late shift RSWs come on. The morning staff tell them what the clients have done and what they've been like in the morning.
3.00	Nearly time for the children to come from school or work site. If I have finished my work sometimes I stand by the door and welcome the children in, ask them what they have done. Some do not talk, but I still ask them.

Brenda - a care assistant

7.20 Leave for work

7.30 Start work
Arrive on wing to check bedrooms. Toilet, wash and dress, make sure general appearance is good, place in wheelchair.
Take residents to dining room for breakfast. Then make beds, tidy bedrooms

9.30 Handover report from night staff

10.00 Take residents a drink (tea or coffee, biscuit) in lounge.
Some but not all residents need assistance to the toilet.
When one does need assistance we help them to and from the toilet. This can be at any time of the day or night.

10.15 Break

10.30 Assist any resident who needs assistance into and out of the bath, help with washing if needed

11.45 Take dirty laundry out and put clean laundry into rooms

12.20 Bring residents to dining room for dinner

1.15 Take some back to lounge or to music and movement

2.00 Drink again - tea or coffee

3.00 Finish, call to the shops, go home

It is good for a handicapped child to mix with others.

Carol - a Nursery Nurse

7.30 Drive to work

7.45 Arrive at work - have a coffee until 8.00

8.00 Get classroom ready for day - make paints and supply CDT workshop equipment and supply literacy area, set up computer workshoparea, construction area, supply tactile workshops with sand, water, clay and all equipment. All equipment has to be fetched from cupboard areas and supplied to each area every day. This work is shared with a team worker.

8.30 Outside equipment to be carried and erected in play areas.
Four members of staff put equipment out into play areas.

8.50 Meeting with team members and arrange and plan any extra duties for day.

9.00 Reception, register and greet 40 children into base. Check dinner money and snack money.
Discuss problems with parents.

9.30 Outside play duty.
Two staff - 80 children in and out.

10.00 Swap duties with team member, play in classroom with children.

10.30 Group activity time.
Children form groups, each group is taughtdifferent areas from curriculum.

11.00 Outside play duty until
11.15 then supervise children toilet and washing hands for lunch.

11.30 Dinner break. Alternate weeks eat with children in classroom or eat with staff in staffroom

12.30 Back in classrooms, tidy and prepare for afternoon session, replenish all equipment.

12.45 Reception as 9.00

1.15 Outside duties and duties as morning session

3.00 Drive home

3.15 Arrive home, make coffee, sleep until time to prepare meal

'Mother & Daughter'

Carol Allcock

Jenny arrives at nursery school between 8.20 and 8.30am every morning.. We ought to be prepared for it but each morning it causes quite a stir.

She bursts in, the door swinging on its hinges and shouts in a loud raucous voice 'I'm here'.

Jenny is an untypical four year old. She marches around the place, stockings round her ankles, shoes on the wrong feet and her fur coat moving in all directions as she propels herself around the room.

'Morning Jenny', I say.

She replies by disrupting the quietness of the room with a grunt.

The door bangs open again to admit Pauline, a very tall, large woman of some thirty years. She shuffles in, her plump hairy legs and size eight feet stuffed into carpet slippers. Her short red skirt is pulled together at the waist with a large safety pin, a broken zip exposing folds of flesh and white knickers.

'Bleeding hell, I've had a right job getting her here this morning, she's been up since five, I'm knackered' she shouts as she lowers herself into a chair.

Pauline sitting on a child's small classroom chair is a sight to behold; her very large ample frame envelopes the chair completely.

She's chatty this morning and obviously feeling better with the world. Our Pauline's life is not a good one. She suffers from a degenerating illness and has learning difficulties.

Someone in the past introduced Pauline to makeup with disastrous results. Her face this morning has been thoroughly painted, her large mouth is covered with the brightest of red lipstick, smudges of the same on her chin and her cheeks are ablaze with blusher. A rainbow of colours extend around her eyes, the eyelids drooping as if to shut out the spectacle.

This is Pauline's mask - her hideaway - her barrier from the world. Behind the barrier is a very lonely woman. Throughout her day and night she encounters abuse and sneers from children and adults alike. Her very existence is a tortuous one.

'I'm going out this morning' she says with some feeling. 'My brother's coming in his car and taking me out into the country. Anyway, I'm off' she says, years dropping off her as she almost skips out the door.

A happy Pauline departs, only to be found some twenty minutes later crying in a corner of the playground.

'What's up, love?' I ask.

'He's gone, gone without me, his bleeding wife won't have me in the car. She says she's not taking me anywhere. It's either her or me, so he left me!'

'Come and have a cup of tea, Pauline'.

'I suppose tha wants me to bleeding make it don't yer' she shouts as she ambles off into the kitchen area.

Preparing for a 100th Birthday

My work as a care assistant involves looking after the general well being of the residents i.e. washing, dressing, talking to them about different topics, taking them to the shops, and to the coast and special occasions like a 100th Birthday party.

We had a 100th birthday in September 1991. To make arrangements for this we had to start in February. It involved team work by the staff, plus involvement from the family. My role in this was to see about the telegram from the Queen, plus Lord Mayor, radio and press coverage.

The first I approached was the Lord Mayor's secretary, who made a note of the date in her diary and said she would also see about the telegram from the Queen. The Mayor's office would get in touch with our home three weeks before the date to make sure everything was still all right to go ahead. Because anything could happen at 99 going on 100.

I next got in touch with the local radio station who said that they could not send anyone but that they would play a request on the day. The T.V. station said they would try to send a camera. The local newspaper said they would write a piece and take a photo.

Other members of staff were involved; one brought in some new dresses for Mrs Jay to try on and choose, one member of staff arranged the entertainment and another arranged the buffet. The family arranged the cake and the drinks.

On the day everything went very well. Mrs Jay got her telegram from the Queen and one from the Director of Social Services.

A good time was had by all.

On the day everything went well.

Brenda Cutforth

22

Workers-in factories

Workers-in factories

Chapter Two

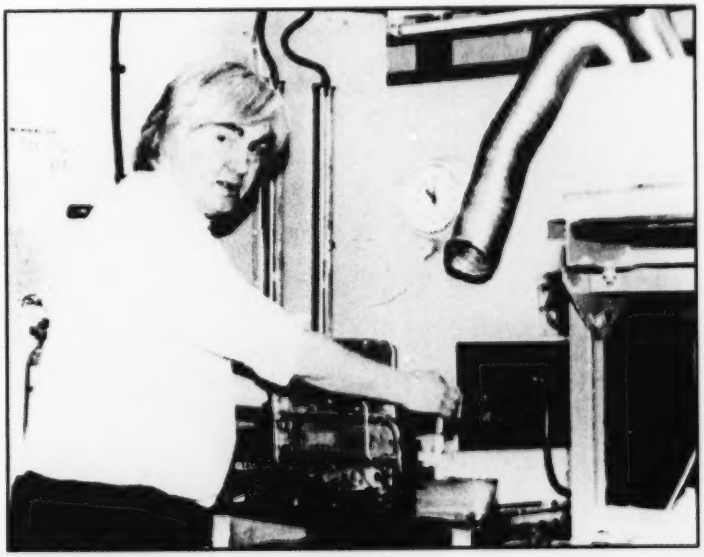
Brian - a floor-standing boiler assembler

7.30 Arrive at work, we don't 'clock in', what happens now is we tick a worksheet

7.35 We start work. There is no need to dash onto the job, as each member of the 'team' is flexible and jobs can vary at times. Most days I work on the gas test rig along with my friend and workmate Dave.

The gas test rig is a large box 8ft high, 6ft wide and 4ft deep, open ended. This is in the middle of the workshop. On it are water gauges and a manometer for gas and air settings.

Dave has been making units up, this is quite complex and involves about 32 parts to complete.



7.35 Pick up unit and fit onto rig, first test the electric circuit; this involves switching on at the plug and listening for the solenoid circuit to click, which ensures the unit will operate

7.36 Connect air to the unit. Using air is the best method for leak detection.

Check inlet side of unit for leaks. This comprises of compressing the FFD (Flame Failure Device) for ten seconds and watching a bubble gauge.

If no bubble, inlet is OK.

7.37 Activate unit. This is done by blanking of the injectors at the back of the unit and applying a flame. When the thermocouple has heated up (a thermocouple is the way the FFD stays open), depress FFD.

7.38 Unit is now operating. This is shown by bubbles in gauge. Once bubbles stop, switch off electrics and remove pad blocking injectors and check FFD is working properly. This has a time allowance of 20-60 secs, if under 20 sec or over 60 secs, fail.

7.39- OK - ready for gas test, I fit the correct burner rail.

7.40 Depending on size of fire, gas set to correct pressure, eg 501 RS = Room Sealed

7.42 Tighten all connections and put on conveyor to be put in a fire.

Do this approximately 46 times per day, including making parts for the unit e.g. wiring.

10.00 Morning Break

12.00 Dinner

12.45 Back to work

3.00 Lunch

4.30 Finish, except Friday, this is 11.30am.

Hours 37 a week

Shop steward, time allowed for meetings

Plus brew any time we want, coffee.

The work of a Safety Officer

Monday

Start work at 8 o'clock and sign in. After about 5 or 10 minutes have a walk round to see that all the areas are OK and there are no problems. Also see if anything is needed from outside storage. If something is needed then I would have to drive the van to the outside storage warehouse.

At 9.30 every Monday I test the fire alarm. Each test is done at a different test point each week. I enter the test result into a fire log. This has to be done by law so that the fire brigade can see that they are tested every week.

At 10 o'clock to 10.15 it is break. After break if anything is needed from storage I would go. Part of my job is a first aider so if anybody has an accident during the day I see to them. If the accident is a bad one then I would take them home, to the doctor, or the hospital. After sorting out the person I would then enter the details in to the accident book and fill out an accident form. Before I can fill in the accident form I would have to investigate what has happened and try to prevent it from happening again.

At 12.30 to 1 o'clock it is lunch time. After lunch I walk round the factory to see that everything is OK and nobody has any problems. If they are short staffed in the warehouse or in the production area then I go and help. If any driving is needed then I do it.

At 3 o'clock I have a 15 minute break. Then I carry on doing whatever is needed until four thirty when it is time to go home.

I have no set job to do, I just do whatever is needed of me during the day.

Neil Thompson

Jackie - Quality controller

8.00 Start work. Go down to the lab. switch on computer get my board, go on to production lines, start at the top of line which is checking Bulk, Component Batch No Labels, Boxes. Go back to lab, put information on to computer, then the line will start. First five bottles off the line, we take and check weigh. If weights are wrong we must get machine adjusted. Once this line is all correct, I will go to next line, and so on. Every 15 minutes we check again also filling time sheets in, putting retained samples away with times we took them off line, micro sample at morning, mid-day, end of day.

9.45 Break time until 10.00am.

Each customer requires different things eg M&S could send a 250ml bottle and they want a visual fill on this product, but the bottle will hold 260ml. Then we have to refer to a specification sheet which tells us how the job runs from beginning to end.

12.00 Dinner time until 12.30 and then back to work which is returning to lines to check everything is right.

2.45 Break 15 min returning back to work at 3.00pm. At the end of the day we get a end of day report from computer printout which we can refer back to. It gives us a report on weight checks, sampling rates, overfills. All these get filed for future reference.

4.30 Time to go home.

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Margaret - an Oxo meat worker

5.30 Set off for work

6.00 Start work

7.00 Fill machines with meat

7.30 Smoke time, 10 minutes

7.45 Start work, keep filling machines, - 10 lines, 60 girls, 4 trays each, 24 sticks of meat on each tray

8.15 Breakfast

8.35 Back to work

9.00 Smoke break

9.10 Back to work

12.00 Dinner in canteen

12.35 Back to work

2.00 End of shift

Jean - a 'cube-maker'

7.15 Set off for work by car withhusband (no traffic problems)

7.45 Start work.
Set up machine.
Run machine till breaktime.
Sticks of meat - made of beef extract and herbs, feed in through rollers, goes through cutting house to make fine granules - cubes come out down the conveyor - foil is put round the cube. Check the cubes as they come through, make sure they're wrapped.
Talk to next door neighbour

9.35 Break

Day carries on

12.40 - 1.30 Lunch at canteen, sit round the table, have a chat

Day carries on

5.00 Finish work - husband picks me up.

I box the Oxos

Monday

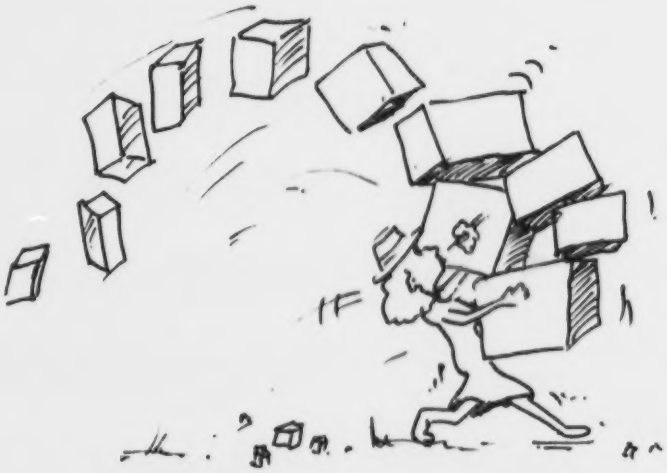
Monday mornings here again, those Mondays soon come round, as one lady quoted as we entered the factory. It's 7.45 and time to start work, the supervisor's standing there with hands on her hips as the latecomers stroll on in.

Everybody knows their place of work so let's start producing those great little cubes you can buy on the shelves those famous little OXOs.

It's hard to imagine the life of a cube but that's what my job entails, to watch the cubes coming on a conveyor, in lines of six towards the machine which will pack them into boxes, their silver foils shining, they are coming my way. It's time to set up the machine, filling the glue pot, bending the cartons, it's all part of the job for me.

It's a funny looking machine, if ever you saw one with a large perspex guard. There's a special holder for the cartons to sit on and a gripper pulls one off at a time. It places it over a square metal box and the cubes are pushed up inside, a fork shaped prong puts glue on the carton and the flaps are pushed in by levers. The heaters are very hot, and the boxes are pushed on through, down the conveyor, towards the wall into the 'hole in the wall' and through to the other room.

Annice Harrison



Yvonne - production worker (shrinkwrapping)

7.20	Go outside for my lift to work
7.45	Arrive for work Work on the shrinkwrap, shrinkwraps the trays of Oxo
10.15	Stop work for morning break, coffee and breakfast.
10.30	Back to work
12.40	Break for lunch in the canteen
1.30	Back to work
3.20	Break again for afternoon tea
3.40	Back to work
4.55	Finish for the day, stop the machines, switch everything off

Recycling the cubes

I get to work about 7.30. Takes me a quarter of an hour, walking through the fire station. I start work at 7.45 - get my apron from the sewing room, and go to my workplace. The buzzer goes and then we start. The shiftworkers are already there - they start at six on two lines.

When we're all here, there's 9 lines working. I switch the cube recovery on at the mains. There's two switch buttons on the machine to make it go, and two stop buttons.

The cube recovery is the machine that recycles the cubes - that's hard ones, mixed with soft ones. The hard ones come through slower. You get more bags done with the soft ones. I don't know why - the belt seems to take them. When they're hard they seem to fall off the little wedges. The foil gets really stuck on the hard cubes. You have to break them up with your fingers and take it off.

We put Oxos into the chute. The chute takes them into the machine. It used to be a tobacco machine - for shredding tobacco! - but it has been converted for the cubes. It takes a couple of hours to learn how to run the machine.

Suction takes the foil off and puts it into a foil bag. A pipe sucks the dust and puts it into a bin. The cubes come out of the machine, then me and my partner pick out the foil that's been missed out. There's bins at each side of us with bags in for us to put the foil in.

Then the foil we miss gets detected by the telemesc - a metal detector - and goes into Pandora - that's another box. Adrian's box is at the bottom of the chute. We named that ourselves - Adrian - but Pandora came from the woman who taught me. Never asked why!

Then the cubes that are all right are weighed. When the bin's full at 15kg we take it off and put it on a stillage (a pallet).

Pauline Bailey

Pauline - stock cube recycling

7.30	Arrive, get apron, walk through to work station
7.45	start work
10.15	Breakfast quarter of an hour.
10.30	Start work doing same job
11.15	go out, ten minute break
11.25	back to same job
12.40	Wash hands, LUNCH
1.30	back to same job
2.00	ten minute break
2.10	back to same job
3.20	break
3.35	back to job
4.00	break time
4.15	start running machine out
4.30	start to clean the machine and tidy round
4.45	go and wash hands, put aprons in for wash.
4.55	Home time.

Each customer requires different things.

Learners

We had taken courses at work in English, Metrication, and Communications; we had found out about how a City Council works, and lots of other things, on Sheffield's 'Take Ten' scheme; those of us who were facing redundancy had learned to fill in forms and write CVs at work; and we'd been to all sorts of other classes at college, with the support of our employers.

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WHY GO ON A COURSE?

Take 15 Course

Why I wanted to go on Take 15, was to get more confident and to find out more information about how our Sheffield City Council runs.

Take 15 is a course for women part time workers. The course is based at Fairfield House Adult Education Centre, part of Loxley College.

What we have done on Take 15 course; we visited different places like childrens' homes. Town Hall, Trietec Computers. Last week Thursday we talked about when we were at school. We have two tutors, Linda and Cathy.

What I like about the course is that all the people are nice and friendly. I feel more confident now than I ever did before, because we have split into small groups and I find I can talk better than in a large group.

Pat Goodman

It's changed the way I think and feel.

At School I was the Quiet One

I can't put things down on paper, I can say them. It takes me ages to do memos at work.

I never dreamed of going on courses - but then I went on the first one. You work at your own speed, everybody is different, each one had your own set piece to do. School is compulsory, but here it's voluntary.

It gave me more confidence, being able to talk to people and join in. It's better education than at school. It made me come out of my shell - it's changed the way I think and feel.

I've gained a lot of experience from all the courses, for work and for home life as well. I did a First Aid course - the neighbours come knocking when anything goes wrong. A little girl scalded herself, and the neighbour came in and asked if I could sort her out.

At school I was the quiet one, sat at the back - I just kept quiet. They'd ask questions, I wouldn't answer, just got my head down - never got involved in any discussions or nothing. It even said on the reports, 'he was a good worker but we would have preferred it if he'd participated more in the class'.

Then when I finished and went to work, and they started sending me on courses, it kind of fetched me out of my shell. I don't know, it could be the people I were with. I never did anything like this at school, joining in and talking to people.

When I was at school you had set work you had to do - this is more free - you do it at your own pace, there's no set rules, you do virtually what you want.

I learned more on a TUC Health and Safety course with discussions, than on a fortnight's training course. That was an intense training, nothing like this - you sat there, they gave you work, one section, then the next section straight after, then again right at the end you had an exam. It was more like being at school.

The course we did at work - I can't really explain - you were learning, but it was like a 'friendly learning', and the teachers set up an individual programme - for you.

Neil Thompson

I feel more confident now than I ever did before

Redundancy

When I first heard about losing my job I really didn't know what to do. I have worked at Brooke Bond Foods for 22 years. I have never had a proper interview or filled in C.V.s, so when the English course came up I went to learn about letter writing to help me apply for jobs and to improve my spelling which is bad. We discussed all our view points and our different feelings on losing our jobs. I found it interesting and helpful. You don't realize how much you forget once you have left school.

There were other courses to go on for people who wanted something different when the factory closed. They felt they wanted to learn some new skills and meet new people. I feel that I have benefitted from the course, but my spelling hasn't improved. I would have liked the course to run a little longer to learn a little more. If I got the chance I would go on other courses, because I am learning all the time.

Yvonne Davies

The future holds more promise than it did two years ago.

34

Showing People my Poetry

One of the benefits of workplace learning is that you get confidence. Other people make you feel good about yourself, bring you out - they give you encouragement if you're a bit nervous.

With the confidence I gained from the course, I started showing people my poetry.

Shirley Sheffield Valentine

San Miguels in a far dark bar
Plastic palms - Club Tropicana
I was posing, acting lairy
He kept glancing, wondering dare he
Ask me up and sure he did
And round the floor we sloped and slid
And tomorrow in the sun
Brandy coffees, music, FUN.
What a night I had that day
With my Rambler from Manchester Way.

Ode to Summer

I hate this weather when my legs stick together
And I have to shave underneath my arms
And my limbs are so wan, so out the fake tan
And I finish up with chocolate ruddy palms!

On the bus into town everybody's oh so brown
From holidays in Italy or Crete
Silly me, I'm content with a blowy week spent
In Whitby with the Folk folk and the sleet.

I'm just getting sussed to the heat and the dust
And raking out the ancient summer frocks
When the clouds reappear, 'Thank God' hear me cheer
As I reach for my woolly cronking socks!

Jean White

(Cronking: a Yorkshire word! My daughter's a real cronker - when she's in she loves to cronk beside the fire, with a great big cup of masho, a big cardigan on... She'll kill me putting this - she's a probation officer now!)

Not having to travel anywhere, learning in working hours.
My regret is that I didn't start a long time ago, because by now I would be where I want to get to.

Communication Descriptions

I did a course on communication. This was run by a consultant. He did it with the Shop Stewards at Baxi. We went away to Stokes Hall in Leyland, and it lasted 3 days. All aspects of communication were covered: listening, speaking skills, plus we did role playing games, on dealing with people. One I particularly enjoyed was about a factory making wooden toys. We were given a sheet about a problem relating to the changing work situation at the time, and had to say what we thought happened next. The format was brilliant. It could have been put about 3 different ways.

Then we split up into groups and did a role play about negotiations between the management at a factory in Birmingham. This turned out to be very good and funny as one of the better stewards who everyone thought was good played the MD and it finished up with both his factories on strike. He attempted to split the two factories with a devious plan but it didn't work.

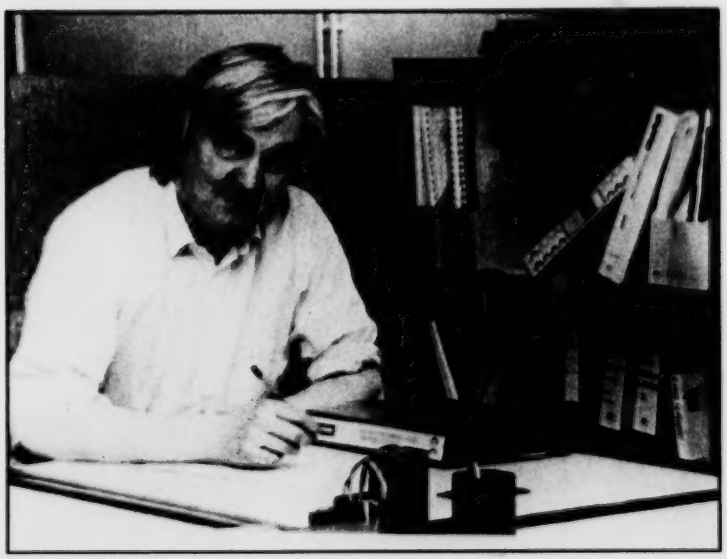
Then to finish we did a survivor's role play, where we were in the desert and it mattered which articles you would keep to survive.

What sort of Courses?

Coping with interviews

The courses have given me more confidence to mix with other people, and how to fill in forms and cope with an interview, but I could do with some more interviews to give me a bit more confidence with myself. I think the courses should be longer, because they were only a couple of hours a week, and you had too much to learn in just a few hours. Not enough hours to do any research, when you work full time.

Pauline Bailey



You were learning, but it was like a 'friendly learning'.

Stimull

Alcohol's not the answer
With its moody twists and turns
The brain needs inspiration
Like Shelley, Keats and Burns.
My brain lies dormant in my head
Like a twisted knarled old weed
The brain needs stimulation
So to this end I read
A Dickens book drops off the shelf
Falls softly in my hand
I know within its pages
I'll find another land.
Oh how I fear for little Nell
But I know everything will turn out well.
Dickens at your heart will rend
But hopefully come to a happy end.
I replace the book on the shelf above
Knowing it will always be there to love

Brian Bentham

I thought I would just be a cleaner until retirement.

Impact on the Wider Community

Dear Parents

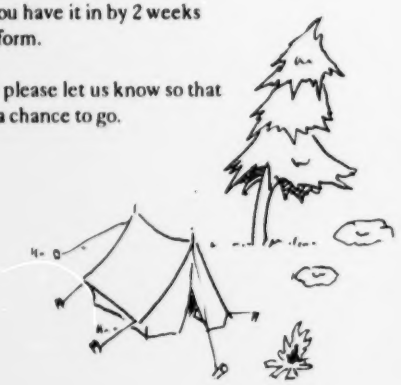
We are having a trip to Outdoor Activity Centre at Whitby Wood Camp Site for the weekend in the last week in August. For the weekend at Plimsole the girls will need a sleeping bag and outdoor gear. They will also need a packed lunch. The girls will have to meet at Victoria Methodist Church at 6.00pm on Friday evening after school. They will be back at 5.30 on Sunday evening.

The camp costs £10, could you have it in by 2 weeks before. They must wear uniform.

If they can't go on the camp, please let us know so that some other people can have a chance to go.

Yours sincerely

Pat Goodman
Assistant Guider



Care / English / C.V. Writing

My job is not very enjoyable but it pays a good wage for the area. I would not have gone on any courses, but as we were being made redundant, I decided to see what was available for me.

I went on three courses at work for 15 weeks each. One was a care course. I was very interested in going into the caring field. We went out on placements, we went to play-schools, old peoples' homes and a school for special needs. I was very interested in going for special needs but when I went there I realised I could not do that kind of work. But when we went to the old peoples' homes I really enjoyed it.

The other courses were English and C.V. I went there to brush up on my English, spelling and filling in application forms. I feel that this brought me up to date with how English is taught now. I went on the C.V. course to see how to apply for a job and do interviews.

I enjoyed all three courses but feel that they were not long enough.

I think that managers should think more of their workers and not the profits. There should be more places like Sheffield where they have talks every week and to be able to put your points of view. But where we work we would not get that.

Margaret Walsh

Metrication

I did a metrication course. It helped me with my job. I also learned something which I thought I could not do. I found it really enjoyable, also not having to travel anywhere, learning in working hours. It has also given me more confidence. If the opportunity comes along I would go on more courses to learn.

Jackie Holden

38

The courses have given me more confidence to mix with other people.

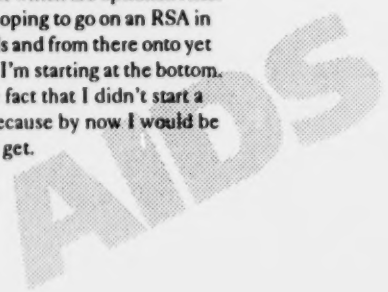
AIDS .... & then the rest of the world

I went on an AIDS course which opened my eyes and dispelled the myths, rumour and untruths about HIV and AIDS. We were shown a video which was very moving. After only two days the course gave me a lot to think about, and I went away thinking I'd like to get involved more with, perhaps, counselling of AIDS sufferers and people who are HIV positive.

I also went on a Childrens Residential Course for four days which in itself was good but I didn't get so much out of it as the other courses I've done.

In September I am doing an Access Course over 3 terms. This is a direct result of going on Take Ten. On the course are six modules, some of which are optional. After the course I'm hoping to go on an RSA in counselling skills and from there onto yet another course. I'm starting at the bottom. My regret is the fact that I didn't start a long time ago because by now I would be where I want to get.

Becky Bailey



Certificate courses

The courses I have been on are word processing, basic English, Caring course, Italian and CV writing and form filling. At the moment I am still on a few of these courses, but I have completed the CV form course which has helped me to write a good letter to send off to my future employers. Also it was very good experience writing about the jobs I used to have and knowing how to set everything down in order, i.e. schools you've attended, what years, what qualifications and also my life experience. I never realized I had done so much till I wrote it down.

The word processing: I have been doing this for two years, and in May and June I take two exams. From this I have learnt the layout of letters, how to address them properly. It has helped me with spelling: when I combined this course with basic English, it has worked very well.

Although I have worked with old people I have recently started a caring course, because I have done the practical side but would like to complete the theory side. Although people have done jobs for years they have no certificates to prove they are able.

The Italian course was for my daughter's benefit, - I started going for her support but I quite enjoy learning myself.

Ti piace - Do you like it?

Annice Harrison

'An individual programme for you'

I never realised I'd done so much till I wrote it down

Thinkers

We've got lots of thoughts about how - and why - employers could be tackling the recession by improving the general education of their workers.

We thought about: what we got out of courses - why learning should take place at the workplace - why more people didn't take up the opportunities available - what benefits our employers gained from sending us on courses - and we made some recommendations for the effective management of workplace learning.

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Thinkers

Chapter Four

What we've got out of our learning

We've gained confidence and self-esteem. Confidence means the confidence to question statements relating to our work - it means having the confidence to meet new people, try new things.

We've learned new things form filling, metrication, CV writing, computing, wordprocessing, spelling, English, maths: we've caught up with how English is taught now, and had a chance to visit other places.

We've found out information about other courses and qualifications and those of facing redundancy have found out about other jobs and new opportunities available.

It's given us a chance to reassess our life; being given the chance to go on courses has made us feel valued and appreciated. We've been able to take a step back to think about work, air feelings or problems away from the workplace.

We've been challenged, to use our brain in the way some of us don't have a chance to in our work - we've stretched our minds and had a chance to improve our education.

We've become more aware of others' needs, we've come into contact with new people and we've got more insight into what's behind labels like 'cleaner', 'machinist', 'home help'. (the home help's boss was amazed at the amount of different skills involved in the job when they were all written down.) We've come to value other peoples' opinions more.

We've had to get over being put down by our workmates for going on courses: people called us 'thickoes', 'I get jibes at work', 'they think you're better than them'.

We think some people might not go to courses because they say it's too late to learn when you're older - but they've never tried it. They are only cynical because they're frightened to try something new - and we've found that when one person plucks up courage and goes on a course, others will follow. We feel maybe the benefits are too low, there are no incentives to make people go on a course.

We've enjoyed the fact of the courses being at work. You're learning in working hours, you don't have to travel or be away from home. We feel you're more comfortable with people you know (although 'familiarity can breed comtempt').

"I've been on courses where I've had to have two weeks away. When I can go home, it has time to sink in more. You can't cram it all in in a fortnight - in a strange place, or in a hotel on your own - at your workplace you know the other people."

We've felt these courses have been enjoyable. They're different from school. At school there was pressure, and competition to succeed. You got shoved to one side, the teachers had pets - now there's been some kind of revolution. In this kind of learning there's no pressure. If someone writes poems, everyone says what they think, and they're supportive, 'it's different to what I'm used to'.

What we think:

We feel that employers should acknowledge that their workers are intelligent people, who need opportunities to use their brains. The more boring the job, the more important this is.

Workers should be treated with respect; their experience and knowledge of the job should be acknowledged, and their ideas about increased productivity and better ways of working should be listened to.

Education should be seen as equally important as job training.

Courses shouldn't only be available if there's a crisis at work, like redundancies coming up. They're of benefit all the time; the employer ends up with a more confident, motivated and loyal team of workers who are better informed, and more effective on the job.

Courses should not be limited to two hours a week for six or twelve weeks, but should be ongoing. Those of us who have done courses over a half day or a whole day a week found these much better than the short two-hour sessions.

None of us think it's fair to be limited to just one course. There should be opportunities for further study available for those who want it, either at work or at the local college.

We don't mind paying something towards evening classes, but these should be set at a reasonable level, or subsidised. And time off should be allowed for exams.

If employers are going to put on courses, we need to have support from line managers; there's no point in having a course available if your boss won't let you have time off your job to go on it. If the management has a good attitude, this should permeate down through to the workplace.

Supervisors and line managers could usually benefit from training themselves, in 'people skills'. Some of us have had to make up our work when we've been on a course. Colleagues are more supportive if there is cover arranged for your job while you're away on courses and finding out about courses, and it makes your life easier too.

You should be able to get a certificate if you go on a course - both for the learning you do on the course, and for your practical experience.

There should be equal opportunities acrosss the board - for women and men workers, and for all staff, including shift workers.

Trades unions should also be involved in putting on and publicising courses.

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Facilities

Learning works well if there's a room set aside at the workplace, managed by the workers.

There needs to be access to word processors and typewriters, and with tables and desks which can be separated off for working on your own, or moved together for working in a group.

It's good to have two tutors to a group if possible, then everyone gets the attention they need, and different levels of work can be going on at the same time.

Publicity

It's your boss's responsibility to keep you informed of courses. Information needs to arrive in time, and be informative and clear.

If you work in a factory during the day, you don't have a chance to visit the local colleges to find out what's on - maybe the college should come to the factory instead.

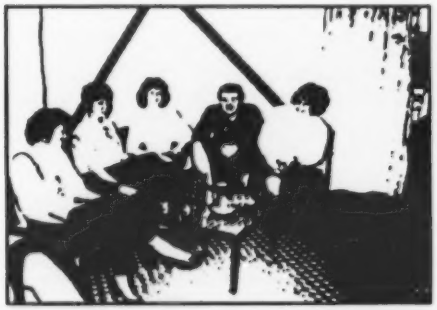
Information should be available at the workplace about other courses on offer in the area. Someone in a workplace could be appointed to receive and give out this information. They could be in touch weekly with the local colleges to find out what's available. That would avoid individual students having to do their own information-gathering and lead to better communications.

If you work in an isolated job like a home help, you don't see your bosses very often and don't have regular staff meetings. For that kind of job a newsletter about education opportunities would be useful, as well as the possibility of tutors coming out to see you at work.

A good way of getting workers to go on courses would be to invite workers who have already been on courses to talk about what they're like, at staff meetings or union meetings.

There is a real fear about going back into education, and this should be acknowledged.

So people should be actively encouraged to go on courses. Some people had a bad time at school and wouldn't want to repeat that, but if they find out that the teaching methods will be completely different, and the atmosphere will be much more relaxed, they may consider going.



Weekenders

At Alston Hall, we ate together, worked together, had fun together, and discovered a whole world that we shared together.

Alston Hall

Shiny black carriage being drawn up the drive toward the large country house all ablaze with light. Now at the entrance to the house. Two footmen jump down from the back of our carriage, open the door and my father steps down, looking very regal in his white shirt and tails. He helps me out for my very first ball at Alston Hall. New Year's Ball 1892.

We walk through the doors and maids take our cloaks, then we are being announced and we are meeting the host and hostess. The jewels she wears, rubies and diamonds all sparkling in the light of the many chandeliers. Will I ever be as beautiful as she?

Into the ballroom. Will anyone ask me to dance? I shall die of embarrassment if I only have my father to dance with.

The end of the ball, time to leave Alston Hall. Why did I worry, I don't know. I danced every dance on this night of the ball. And one young man asked my father if he could call on me, after the ball.

I will never forget my very first ball - the laughter, the dancing, the beautiful ladies in their beautiful gowns. But most of all the drive in the carriage pulled by four white horses to Alston Hall.

Then I awake to the sound of the bell. It is time to get up at Alston Hall. My tutors await and my dreams almost go back to reality, in the year 1992. Now Alston Hall has become committed to learning, and is called Alston Hall Residential College, and a finer place would be hard to find.

Brenda Cutforth

Dear All

I have just been to Alston Hall for a writing weekend to improve my writing skills. I found it most enjoyable and I met some lovely people; everyone was so easy to get along with, I was so glad I went.

I didn't know what to expect and was very nervous but I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I feel I have improved my writing and learned to express myself a little better. The teachers were very good; they listened and most of all they tried to help you without making you feel thick.

I feel a little more confident about myself and my abilities when I go looking for my new job, I feel more competent in myself. When you have worked so long for one firm it's hard to motivate yourself, you feel thrown on the scrap heap. But meeting different people, listening to them and their experiences helped me a lot, gave me more hope of finding a job and of broadening my horizons and looking for something other than factory work.

I hope in the near future we can all do it again, meet up and go on other courses. I wish it could have lasted longer - people gave up their own time to join and help. I have told friends at work what they missed and if we get a chance to do it again I will do all I can to encourage them to come along, not only to learn, but to meet really nice people.

Let's hope we all meet again soon.

Yvonne Davies

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Weekend

The crunch of the car tyres on the long drive heralded the appearance of the visitors, who had arrived. I looked up at the front of the hotel, it wasn't in the least imposing, more a friendly appearance. Alston Hall is at Longridge; in its not overlarge interior there goes on, over differing times and days, many things; you can study everything from Maths to Lacework.

We were here on a 'LAWTEC'* funded course which would last over a weekend, tutors were provided.

The tutors turned out to be very friendly and professional once we got their names right. One tutor, Graham, came from Sheffield, he was very easy to communicate with and eased us into the weekend; the other tutors who were Fiona, Mary, Chris and Clare, all played their part well, Fiona had the additional problem of looking to her six months old baby but coped admirably.

As to the students we all got on well together, even though the mix was uneven, 75% women 25% men. When the results are published I think everyone will be pleased and feel it's been worthwhile.

We are hoping by people getting better reports of the courses they will try to get more involved.

To sum up:
Venue: Alston Hall. Brilliant!
Tutors, Excellent!
Students, well pleased!

Brian Bentham

*LAWTEC - Lancashire Area West Training & Enterprise Council

Hotel Reception, far from home
Outside line (wait for tone)
Step inside to find the bar
Remember I must lock the car
In the bar decide to stop
Whiskey, water, just a drop
Phone call home, life's a pain
Engaged tone, onto her mother again.

Brian Bentham

The Weekend - Timetable

Friday	Arrivals	
	Dinner	
	Introductions	
Saturday	Breakfast	
	Workshops	Benefits of workplace learning
		Our Working Day
	Lunch	
	Free time	writing, walking
	Tea & cakes	
	Dinner	
	Large group	Readings & discussion of work so far
	Party	
Sunday	Breakfast	
	Workshop	Shopfloor recommendations for workplace learning
	Coffee	
	Large group	Readings, continued
		Feedback
		Roundup of weekend
		Evaluations
		Choose Editorial committee - Where to next?
	Photocall	
	Lunch	
	and home	

Alston Hall:

A Personal View

I was interested in coming to Alston Hall for this weekend. It differs from the Take 10 course in that you're not just meeting council workers, but people in the private sector as well. It takes you outside your immediate working environment.

One of the things I realise from coming here is how much safer (at the moment) council jobs are than in the private sector as a whole, because of its policy over job protection. When the news over local council spending showed that jobs and services would be at risk, due to the cutbacks, it was feared that a substantial number of jobs in our area would go, but up till now these have been minimal.

On the other hand, some of our course mates are faced with redundancy in the private sector due to competition, costs and automated machinery.

Although no numbers have been mentioned, it's possible that the 400 workers may be unemployed at the end of the year, unless they get redeployment in a different area. Hopefully this course may offer them a chance to choose other options unless they decide to try further education.

In the future it would be good to see private sector employees given the same employment protection policy as council workers, though I appreciate that it would be difficult to reinforce this as no two companies operate in the same way or have the same budgets at their disposal. It would be a breath of fresh air to see companies investing more cash into people instead of machines.

Richard Redward

Are you a 'communicator' if you come on a course?
It takes a great deal of effort to come on a course.

At the end of the weekend we all sat down and thought about what we'd felt, what we'd learned and what we were going to go on and do.

What we felt

Easy with people: everybody friendly

Angry at the lack of opportunities for most people

I've felt comfortable with mixing with people on my level and that it has given me more confidence to carry on.

Not knowing what to expect from this weekend, I was nervous to say the least, my anxiety soon evaporated. I feel the warmth and friendliness that has been felt in such a short space of time is very special.

Great - and horrified at so much wasted talent - all these people with so much to offer trapped in often mundane jobs with too little opportunity to develop.

This weekend has been wonderful meeting new people, learning new things.

I have enjoyed this course very much and would like to go on any further courses that are arranged. Everyone was very friendly and all the tutors were very informative.

I feel this weekend has been particularly beneficial because of all the people I have met from different workplaces. It broadens my outlook.

I have felt it has been a very useful and enjoyable weekend, Alston Hall has all the relaxed amenities to enable you to work sufficiently and competent in all areas.

Sadness in some ways, that there is so much wasted intelligence in this country and so much lack of respect for people.

I have enjoyed the course and the people I have met.

I have enjoyed meeting new people, asking them questions of what they thought of workplace learning.

I feel very good that I have got an opportunity to help myself with help from tutors. The feeling did not happen until a year ago. I realised there was more in life than cleaning and watching TV and I realise more than ever now I am not on my own with these feelings.

The way the course was run made me feel good, the college and the people made you feel at home just like one big happy family.

I have enjoyed this course this weekend as it has taught me how different other peoples' jobs are from mine. The people were very friendly.

Excited that everyone has got so much out of an event which was originally 'just' to put some writing together. Overwhelmed that its been such a success. Sorry we didn't reach some other individuals with this course.

Anxious feelings gone, found enjoyment meeting different people from different jobs and backgrounds.

I've enjoyed meeting new people and doing the work in a pleasant environment.

Very anxious at first but as the weekend passed by feeling more confident and comfortable.

Very anxious about the meeting.

I've felt a great deal of support and co-operation in what I feel about workplace education. I've also felt encouraged and more confident.

What we've learned

I feel I have learnt a knowledge of people's feelings and thoughts. Also I know how Oxo cubes are made and have tried to use a word processor.

If they put a room aside for courses there would be more people willing to learn.

I've learnt that I am comparatively fortunate in that I work for Sheffield Council instead of in private enterprise. I've also learnt how to communicate in a group, and also that there are more and more people interested in further education.

I've learnt what education for adults is like and that it is not as hard as what people think.

The need for education in the work place.

That people do not want to know about education in their later years.

I've learnt a hell of a lot about making Oxo cubes, also about the women and men on this weekend and their thoughts and feelings about their work.

I have learned that in some areas the companies help their workers to improve their education.

What I've learnt is working for Sheffield Council is very good compared with some places in the private sector as regards training, conditions. I won't take things for granted as much in the future.

That everyone is equal, everyone's story of their day and their work is illuminating and interesting, everyone can make recommendations about how their work and learning and conditions can be improved, everyone has a pride in their own work (even when their bosses think they don't) and everyone should have a voice and be listened to, and treated justly and fairly.

Learned how to use a word processor.

Detailed planning of a course is not essential to ensure positive results.

What I've learnt this weekend is the people on the course are more or less in the same predicament as me. Knowing how to get information on various courses and talking about difficulties in workplace learning. It's been an education in sitting down and writing about all these problems that brings it home to you that there still needs more information to be made more ready available to be sent out within firms.

How fortunate I am to work for a Council who puts courses on for workers and is prepared to spend time and money on informing and educating their employees.

I've learnt about the working conditions of other people.

Learning that I have got a good employer in Sheffield City Council; that not all employers give their workers the same opportunities for further education.

About Brooke Bond:

didn't know

Oxo is made by Brooke Bond
what goes into an Oxo cube
the factory is to move to Worksop
about Pandora and Adrian
about workplace education and redundancy
Brooke Bond owned by Unilever
about 70% of supermarket shelves come from Unilever

About other people:

didn't know

about Baxi and their special room to study
about conditions in the private sector.

The main point I have found this weekend is the difference between the private sector and the council. I work for Sheffield. We are allowed to go on courses and encouraged to go on them as we get paid because we do them in works time. The people I have been with on this course have to do training 90% in their own time. Whether this is why not many people apply for courses I do not know. The other reason could be because they think it is stupid to help themselves and go on in the same old rut or they may think they will show themselves up confessing they would like to learn more.

What we're going to go on and do

The weekend gave us lots of energy to go on and do lots of things - apart from producing this book. Everyone - students and tutors - had some plans:

I will try to go further in education, not just courses run by the council. Even if I only gain credits I think I will feel 'I DID THAT FOR ME'.

I plan to go on and find out more about courses: from the Union (G.M.B.), the Council, the W.E.A. and local colleges.

Think about ways that I can effectively challenge the current situation. Tell other people/workers about the good deal that Sheffield workers get, so that they can think about getting it too.

I hope there are more courses available after this one as I would like to know more.

I plan to carry on with my usual courses and go on any more courses that may be available, either through my workplace or the college. I would like to get as much education before I am made redundant, not solely because of that but once I started learning I don't want to stop.

I am hoping to go as many courses as I know I can do. I have a lot more confidence in myself now so my scope is a lot larger.

Certainly go on other courses without feeling anxious about not knowing who will be there and what to expect from unknown situations.

I want a job on the local council, or I may even move to Sheffield!

Hopefully go on to more courses e.g. ACCESS course in September. I see this as an opening which will lead to me studying a specific subject in the future.

When I get back I shall look at leaflets and try to go on more courses if possible. Try to encourage more people to attend courses with me.

To apply for further courses. I have already applied for one course. And to talk about my experiences to other workers.

To improve my own education and to pass the message on to the people back at work.

Ask the tutor about if I could use the word processor when I do my basic English on Tuesday evening group.

Keep going!

I'm determined to get more money to get more people together for more events like this. I'm going to make sure the editorial group gets together and takes back information to everyone while we're putting the book together. I'm going to think about getting money to get workers all over Europe together. 'Force' programme. I'm going to work hard on distribution of our book and leaflet. I'm going to try to keep in touch with you all. (A newsletter? Help!)

and finally - a commitment which should act as a motto for all workplace learners:

I plan to show people I am.....

not
just a
number

.. ..and I am willing to go further on in my education to prove I can be a somebody.

Further Information from:

Adult Learning at Work
CSET (Centre for the Study of Education and Training)
Lancaster University
Lancaster
LA1 4YL

Take Ten
Loxley College
Fairfield House
1 Broomhall Road
Sheffield
S10 2DN

Workbase Training
67a High Road
Wood Green
London
N22 6BH

(widely regarded as the leader in the field of negotiated workplace basic education schemes)

LAWTEC (Lancashire Area West Training and Enterprise Council)

4th Floor
Duchy House
96 Lancaster Road
Preston
PR1 1HE

Further Reading:

Time Off To Learn: Paid Educational Leave and Low Paid Workers, Mace, J. & Yarnitt, M. 1987. Methuen. Reviews a number of workplace basic education schemes and sets them in the context of workers' rights to paid educational leave.

Setting Up Workplace Basic Skills Training: guidelines for practitioners. Workbase Training. ALBSU, 1990. Checklists and advice on marketing, research, establishing needs, setting up provision, evaluation, and trouble-shooting.

The Impossible Dream? The Future of Paid Educational Leave in Britain. Society of Industrial Tutors and Transport & General Workers Union. Deals with four basic questions about paid educational leave:

1) WHO is to be eligible for PEL?
2) WHAT is to be the content of the education for which release is given?
3) HOW LONG is the leave to be?
4) WHO will pay for it?

Releasing Potential: Company Initiatives to Develop People at Work. (Vol. 1: The Main Report, Vol. 2: The Case Studies), Metcalf, H. 1992. N.T.T.F., Department of Employment, Sheffield. Available from Meads, P.O. Box 12, West P.D.O, Leengate, Nottingham, NG7 2GB.
A study of ten companies going about promoting a learning environment in different ways: includes Baxi Heating as one case study.

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More copies of this book are available from CSET, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YL (tel. 0524 65201 x2864, fax 0524 844788) at £3.50 each inc p&p (£3.25 each for orders of 10 or more).
Ideas for using some of the articles as worksheets in ABE classes are also available from CSET in an accompanying booklet, cost 50p.

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